

And the mother knelt down, and the half-spoken prayer
That she offered to God in her agony wild
Was, "Father, have mercy, look down on my child!"
She flew to her husband, she clung to his side—
Oh, there was her refuge whate'er might betide.
"Fire!" "Fire!" It was raging above and below—
And the cheeks of the sailors grew pale at the sight,
And their eyes glistened wild in the glare of the light.
'Twas vain o'er the ravage the waters to drip;
The pitiless flame was the lord of the ship,
And the smoke in thick wreaths mounted higher and higher.
"O God, it is fearful to perish by fire."
Alone with destruction, alone on the sea;
"Great Father of mercy, our hope is in Thee."

—Anon.

ARE OCEAN DISASTERS DUE TO UNSKILLED CREWS, THE RESULT OF LOW WAGES?

BY GEORGE C. BODINE,

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Early reports of the *Volturno* disaster indicate that the crew was largely responsible for the loss of life incident to manning the lifeboats. And possibly, too, for the failure to discover and put out the fire in time.

This is not surprising to anyone familiar with the character of trans-Atlantic seamen in general and the conditions that often make them un dependable in emergencies.

Most Atlantic liners are manned not by the best seamen, but to a large extent by the riff-raff of the sea. The pay and living conditions are not such as to invite and keep good sailors. It is also too easy for untrained men to get jobs as "able seamen."

And in spite of the lesson of the *Titanic* and other disasters, the men, such as they are, seldom receive thorough training.

Moreover, the liners do not carry enough sailors. The crew is composed of a few real seamen, supplemented by waiters, flunkies, machinists, firemen, etc.

It is a fact that on the ordinary liner a captain counts himself lucky if he can muster two able seamen to a lifeboat. The rest of the six to twelve men needed to a lifeboat are waiters, etc., who often don't know how to lower a boat, and seldom are

skillful enough to handle an oar.

There are drills, of course, but they consist usually in merely lowering the boats, without rowing, and often without even touching the water.

The pay has been raised somewhat through the efforts of the British Seamen's Union, but the best pay for a sailor is yet only \$30 a month. How can a man maintain a family ashore on that and how can you get good men for such wages?

The Wilson bill, now pending in Congress, aims to improve the service by requiring each sailor to pass an examination by the department of commerce, or prove three years' actual experience at sea or on the great lakes. That would shut out the untrained men and raise wages.

The bill includes many other reforms intended to safeguard the rights of seamen, and thus to raise their efficiency and character.

In proportion as you get a better class of sailors, you will see fewer *Volturno* tragedies, resulting from ineffective or demoralized crews.

WELL FIXED

"Has she any visible means of support?" "Has she! Say, did you ever see her in one of those slit skirts?"—
Judge.